

Cummins Falls State Park Strategic Management Plan

2023 – 2033

DRAFT

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Park Purpose, History and Description

Cummins Falls State Park is a 306-acre state park that contains its namesake. A beautiful waterfall on the Blackburn Fork State Scenic River, that drops 75 feet into a large plunge pool that is considered one of the best natural swimming holes in the country. The Blackburn Fork State Scenic River flows through the park and is part of the Cumberland River watershed, which is one of the most diverse freshwater ecosystems in the world. Visitors come from all around the United States to do the relatively short but adventurous hike to the base of the waterfall, for the adventure and experience of viewing the wondrous beauty of the waterfall with rock ledges and a large plunge pool at the bottom, where they can swim in the waters of the plunge pool and climb the ledges to stand in the waterfall. Many visitors come to fish the river. The clear cool healthy stream is rich with aquatic life and perfect habitat for small mouth bass and other sport fishing species.

Cummins Falls State Park was established May 22, 2012. Prior to that it was owned by the Cummins Family for over 180 years. A 407-acre farm acquired by John Cummins in 1825, which has had some form of agriculture since then. Mr. Cummins built a water driven mill on the Blackburn Fork River less than a half mile upstream of the waterfall. The mill was used to grind grain, card wool and saw timber. The mill washed away in a flood in 1928 and was not rebuilt. There was a store and blacksmithing operation near the mill. The mill, store and blacksmithing operation along with a moonshining operation were on what is now park property. Cummins Falls has always been a destination for outdoor recreation. Locals and students from Tennessee Tech used the place often for outdoor recreation. Prior to the mill being washed away, people would bring the grain and wool to be ground or carded and would make a mini vacation of it. While waiting they would camp, swim, fish and enjoy the waterfall. The Cummins Family allowed all who wished to come and enjoy the river and waterfall.

Goals, Objectives and Action Plans

THE RESOURCES: Exemplary Natural and Cultural Stewardship

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *More and better stewards:* Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to preserve, protect, and share Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

Action Plan:

- Partner with the Tennessee Naturalist Program, establish a Cummins Falls Chapter and host classes at Cummins Falls State Park
- Provide more volunteer opportunities and recognize our volunteers through social media throughout the year and implement an annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner
- Increase interpretive and educational programming, engaging the county schools we already program to and reaching out to those we have not been programming to, also engaging more home school groups, while increasing our weekly program offerings at the park for the general public, and increasing our engagement of the Mustard Seed Ranch.
- Engage local leaders twice a year through engagement at the park in existing events or a new event.

Objective - *Better resource management practices:* Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

Action Plan:

- Utilize employee job plans to address resource stewardship including education and training about the park's resources.
- Resource Management Plans that address preservation, active protection, and restoration of degraded habitats or historic structures within Cummins Falls State Park.
- Provide recreational opportunities and educational programs throughout the year that instill a greater appreciation of resource preservation.
- Identify and encourage staff to attend training to grow their knowledge on resource management topics.

Objective: *Better data and technology:* Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resources stewardship.

Action Plan:

- Begin an All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventory utilizing seasonal staff who are qualified in specific areas, as well as Tennessee Tech students and other qualified volunteers.
- Research the best technology to store, manage and use the data collected.
- Create video content for educational programs to put on social media and on a TV at the park for visitors to benefit from.
- Use existing programs and apps such as iNaturalist and PictureThis-Plant Id to obtain species data and to utilize in programming.

THE VISITOR: Welcoming and Inviting to All

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be the most accessible, welcoming, and inviting system of parks that enriches Tennesseans and visitors through excellent interpretation, education, and resource-based recreation.

Objective: *accessible, welcoming, and inviting to all:* create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited.

Action Plan:

- Complete project for construction of an observation deck that overlooks the waterfall with ADA compliant accessibility including a parking area and ADA trail access.
- Acquire one or more modes of transportation designed for use on trails for people with disabilities that are unable to enjoy being out on a trail without the use of a mechanized or motorized mode of transportation.
- Collaborate with Facilities Management to plan and establish a scenic and interpretive trail that is ADA compliant for the enjoyment and enhancement of the quality of life for people with disabilities.
- Engage with facilities and organizations that work with and help people with special needs to get them outside and into the park for park staff led programs and other activities.

Objective: *high quality programming:* develop and support mission-based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community wellbeing.

Action Plan:

- Maintain and grow our Junior Ranger type programs. Continually reviewing them to ensure they are quality programs that contain natural, historical and cultural resource-based material, to help ensure future representation in the preservation and protection of our natural spaces and our environment.
- Maintain and grow our outreach (off-site programs) in schools and other organizations. Continually reviewing them to ensure they are quality programs that are relevant and contain natural, historical and cultural resource-based material, to help ensure future representation in the preservation and protection of our natural spaces and our environment.
- Develop and maintain a portfolio of programs for all age groups that contain natural, historical and cultural resource-based material for our visitors with varying cost to the user from “free to fee”. Evaluating and updating these programs periodically to ensure they are quality, relevant and accurate.
- Develop self-guided opportunities. Including signage, printed material with checklists and other educational content that can be used by all age groups, as well as, youth activity booklets, such as Junior Ranger type guides.
- Seek partnership opportunities and create volunteer opportunities with our programming efforts.

Objective: *resource-based outdoor recreation:* provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities that ensure representation of Tennessee’s natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

Action Plan:

- Continue to provide and maintain the tremendous outdoor recreational experience of hiking to the base of the waterfall along the banks of the Blackburn Fork State Scenic River and allowing people to get into the water and swim in the plunge pool below Cummins Falls waterfall and to get in the water coming over the waterfall when appropriate.
- Continue to provide and build upon and improve recreational programs that are based on the water resource of the Blackburn Fork State Scenic River, such as fishing and snorkeling.
- Maintain, improve, and grow the system of trails and scenic overlooks at Cummins Falls State Park.
- Maintain, improve, and grow passive recreational opportunities such as overlooks and sit places to view, listen and enjoy the natural surroundings. This includes picnic areas.
- Periodically review and evaluate the recreational programs we offer and the Recreational opportunities available to our visitors to ensure quality experiences and to grow these opportunities where appropriate.

THE AMENITIES: Well-Maintained Facilities and Amenities

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be well maintained with facilities and amenities that delight visitors and make Tennesseans proud.

Objective: *Improve maintenance:* Improve overall maintenance and upkeep of all park facilities and amenities that contribute to meaningful visitor experiences.

Action Plan:

- Work with Facilities Management to identify and complete deferred maintenance projects
- Establish preventative maintenance plans
- Be engaged with development of future projects
- Use HIPPO efficiently
- Add fulltime maintenance worker position and at least two additional job share positions

Objective: *Better park accessibility:* ensure all visitors have opportunities for meaningful experiences in every Tennessee State Park.

Action Plan:

- Complete observation deck with ADA accessibility project at the main waterfall overlook (RTP grant with Friends Group)
- Add ADA parking at lower parking area for access to the observation deck
- Continually evaluate park for ADA compliance and other accessibility opportunities within Access 2030 initiative
- Annual trail assessments

Objective: *Quality and welcoming facilities and amenities:* provide high-quality and well-planned facilities and amenities that enrich the visitor experience.

Action Plan:

- Provide organized, effective, and welcoming signage throughout the park. Inventory and evaluate signage annually
- Plan new and evaluate existing displays to engage visitors and enrich their experience
- Maintain clean, aesthetic, and operable facilities
- Ensure staff are trained in great customer service

THE OPERATIONS: Operational Excellence

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be a national model for operational excellence in a state park system.

Objective: *Support and empower our people:* support and empower our workforce by creating a caring environment that encourages professional growth and great customer service.

Action Plan:

- Provide a safe and welcoming work experience
- Create more diverse workforce
- Provide training and professional development
- Provide opportunities for career pathways for employees

- Develop optimal staffing plans
- Provide opportunities for staff to engage in new ideas, planning and decisions

Objective: *Efficient and effective operations:* provide efficient, effective, and fiscally responsible service to Tennesseans and our visitors.

Action Plan:

- Budgetary compliance
- Public support and engagement
- Partnerships
- Improve/address environmental challenges

Park Overview

Site Fact Sheet

Park Name	Cummins Falls State Park
Site Manager	Ray Cutcher
Area Manager	Kenneth Gragg
Park acreage	306
Total number of visitors (FY 2022)	276,893
Total expenses before CO (FY 2022)	\$954,387.00
Total revenues (FY 2022)	\$570,936.00
Retail cost recovery % ¹	75%
Park cost recovery %	60%
Average expense per visitor (FY 2022)	\$3.45
Average revenue per visitor (FY 2022)	\$2.06
Gross profit or loss	\$383,451.00
Total full-time available positions / filled	8/8
Total part-time available positions / filled	1/1 + 1/1 + 2/1 AmeriCorps
Primary feeder markets	Out of state, middle Tennessee, Nashville
Primary reasons people visit	The Waterfall, to view, photograph, hike to the base and get in the water, Sunbath, fish, hike, Picnic, Junior Ranger Day Camps and other programs.
Opportunities for improvement	Build upon agriculture heritage of the area. Acquire additions properties for the protection of the view shed, sense of place, to provide additional outdoor recreational opportunities and provide more access points to the Blackburn Fork. Address accessibility issues.

Key Attractions

The amenities or features listed below are those that seem to be most popular for visitors.

- Blackburn Fork State Scenic River
- Visit to the base of the waterfall
- Swimming /Sunbathing / Wading /Exploring

¹ Based on T.C.A. 11-3-305, Cost recovery of revenue-generating facilities

- Fishing
- Giftshop / Visitor Center
- Hiking Trails
- Overlooks
- Picnic Area

Site and Operations Assessment

This site and operations assessment is a culmination of analyses and findings from a review of the condition of facilities, infrastructure, and operations at Cummins Falls State Park. The findings and observations are not intended to be an exhaustive review of all issues present, but provide a basic understanding of the predominant issues that contribute to the site's current operating conditions. The assessment includes the following:

1. Site and Facilities Assessment
2. Operational Assessment
3. Financial Assessment

Site and Facility Assessment

Methodology

Facility and asset conditions are rated using a differential scale of excellent, good, fair, or poor. Descriptions of conditions that are attributed to each of these findings are also provided.

Scale of Conditions	
Rating	General Description
Excellent	Facilities/amenities are in 'excellent' condition when they show little or no maintenance or repair problems. Facilities do not feature any major design or operational issues or flaws that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into public use and the users perceive them to be in excellent shape.
Good	Facilities/amenities are in 'good' condition when they show only minor maintenance or repair problems. Most maintenance issues with these facilities typically appear to be the result of age and/or heavy use. Facilities may only feature minor design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are moderately easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into service and the users perceive them to be adequate for their use, but probably not in excellent shape.
Fair	Facilities/amenities are in 'fair' condition when they show significant maintenance or repair problems. Facilities generally exhibit ongoing maintenance issues that appear to be the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Some maintenance and repair needs may compound their fair condition by being deferred because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities require more effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users may perceive them as being less than adequate for their use and in a state of deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.

Poor	Facilities/amenities are in 'poor' condition when they show significant, on-going maintenance or repair problems that ultimately may result in suspended use for repair/replacement. Maintenance and repair issues are possibly the result of poor maintenance and clearly the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Problems with the facilities are often compounded over time due to consistently deferred maintenance and repair because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities may feature major design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities require excessive effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users often perceive them as being inadequate for their use and in a state of serious deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.
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Facility Inventory and Assessment

The table below is an inventory of facilities and amenities at Cummins Falls State Park, and provides the assessed condition of each as reviewed in May 2023.

Site Asset / Amenity	Quantity	Condition
Visitor Center	1	Excellent
Restrooms	1	Good
Barn	1	Good
Tiny House (storage)	1	Fair
Picnic Area	1	Fair
Maintenance Shop / Garage	1	Excellent
Old Cummins House	1	Poor
Anna Cummins House	1	Poor

Trail Inventory and Assessment

Trail Name	Total	Condition
Blackburn Fork River Trail	0.56	Good
Blackburn Fork River Trail Direct	0.27	Good to Fair
Blackburn Fork Riverbed Trail	0.49	Good
Delia Bell Trail	1.48	Good to Excellent
Falls Overlook Trail	0.35	Fair
John Cummins Trail	0.38	Good
Storybook Trail	0.37	Good to Excellent
Grand Total	3.90	

New Assets Needed

List new assets and amenities that would fall under capital expenditures that are needed to improve visitor experience and operational efficiency.

New Asset & Amenities	Description
Picnic shelters (2)	At least two picnic shelters to support the visitor experience

Operational Assessment

The Operational Assessment includes:

1. An inventory and classification of programs and services being provided at the site,
2. A review of staffing at the site,
3. A review of concessionaires and partners operating at the site,
4. Visitation and customer satisfaction, and
5. Professional development and training.

Inventory and Classification of Programs and Services

Programs and services are classified into one of three major categories:

- 1) Core or Essential Services;
- 2) Important Services; and
- 3) Value added or Visitor Supported Services.

Functions of the site are classified into these categories based in part on the mission and public mandates for both the site and the agency. For the programs and services in each of these categories, there are financial performance expectations that will define how services are funded and evaluated.

CATEGORY 1 – CORE SERVICES *[Largely supported by public subsidies]*

Core programs, services and facilities are those the agency must provide and/or are essential in order to capably govern and meet statutory requirements. The failure of the agency to provide Category 1 services at adequate levels could result in significant negative consequences for the public and the resources under protection. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as core or essential are:

- The services are mandated by the agency's law or charter or are contractually obligated by agreement to provide the services.
- The services are essential to protecting and supporting the public's health and safety.
- The services protect and maintain valuable assets and infrastructure.
- The services would generally and reasonably be expected and supported by residents, businesses, customers and partners.
- The services are those that cannot or should not be provided by the private sector.
- The services provide a sound investment of public funds.

The following programs and services offered at Cummins Falls State Park have been identified as **core services**:

- Safety and Security – Law Enforcement
- Safety and Security – Safety Patrol at Base of Waterfall
- Safety and Security – Monitoring Weather/rainfall Conditions and Water Level Conditions at the Base of the Waterfall and Upstream
- First Aid and Rescue / Evacuation Operations
- Site and Facility Maintenance

CATEGORY 2 – IMPORTANT SERVICES *[Supported by a balance of revenues and public subsidy]*

Important programs, services and facilities are those the agency should provide, and are important to governing and effectively serving residents, businesses, customers and partners. Providing Category 2 services expands or enhances the agency's ability to provide and sustain its core services. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as important are:

- The services expand, enhance or support identified core services.
- The services are broadly supported and utilized by the community, and are considered an appropriate, important, and valuable public good. Public support may be conditional upon the manner by which the services are paid for or funded.
- The services generate income or revenue that offsets some or all of the operating cost and/or are deemed to provide economic, social or environmental outcomes or results.

The following programs and services offered at Cummins Falls State Park have been identified as **important services**:

- Friends Group
- Partnership with Jackson County Chamber of Commerce
- Cummins Falls Marathon running event
- CEC Consulting to Provide Rainfall Modeling Data for the Blackburn Fork River
- Tennessee Tech Support
- Interpretive and Educational Programming

CATEGORY 3 – VISITOR SUPPORTED SERVICES *[Almost exclusively supported by earned revenue]*

Visitor supported programs, services and facilities are those discretionary services that the agency may provide when additional funding or revenue exists to offset the cost of providing those services. Category 3 services provide added value above and beyond what is required or expected. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as visitor supported are:

- The services expand, enhance or support Core Services, Important Services and the quality of life of the visitors, community or stakeholders.
- The services are supported, valued and well utilized and provide an appropriate and valuable public benefit.
- The services generate income or funding from sponsorships, grants, user fees or other sources that offset some or all of their cost and/or provides a meaningful return on investment.

- The Services can possibly be provided through outsourcing or use of concessionaires, providing opportunities for community enterprise or services that may not otherwise be provided by the agency.

The following programs and services offered at Cummins Falls State Park have been identified as **visitor supported services**:

- Cummins Falls Marathon running event
- Junior Ranger Day Camps
- Rock Climbing Workshops
- Support and Programs for Mustard Seed Ranch
- Gift Shop

Personnel / Staffing Review

The tables below and on the following page provide a basic review of the current staffing at the site.

Full Time Equivalent Employees

Position / Title	Quantity (FTE)	Compensation Total
Park Manager 1	1	*
Park Ranger 3	1	*
Park Ranger 2	3	*
Administrative Assistant 1	1	\$55,801.00
Clerk 3	1	\$39,655.00
Clerk 2	1	\$35,755.00
TOTAL	8	\$541,880.00

**Law enforcement compensation confidential by TN law.*

Part Time Employees

Position / Title	Quantity	Compensation Total
Seasonal Interpretive Recreator	1	\$31,688.00
TOTAL		

Labor Support

Labor Support	Annual Hours
Volunteers	1,020.5
Community Service Workers	82
2 Seasonal Park Rangers	1950
1 Seasonal SIR, 8 AmeriCorps Positions	1950 / 3,150
Other: _____	-
TOTAL	8,152.5

Total Labor Compensation Expense

Labor Type	Labor Expense
Full Time Equivalent Employees	\$584,428.00
Part Time Employees	\$29,963.00
TOTAL Annual Labor Expense	\$614,391.00

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Additional Future Positions Needed

Position / Title	Quantity	FTE or PT	Year Needed	Justification
Conservation Worker 3	1	FTE	2023	Maintenance Needs / Sustainability
Seasonal Interpretive Recreator	2	PT	2024	AmeriCorps support not sustainable.
TOTAL	3			

Customer Service

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
Net Promoter Score	2023	43
Google	2023	4.7 / 5.0

Professional Development and Training

The following professional development and training opportunities are being explored and planned for the staff and volunteers at this park:

- Routine management training
- Rope Rescue Training
- Swiftwater Rescue Training
- Ranger 3 Training
- Birds of Prey Training
- Routine law enforcement training

Summary of Key Recommendations

Please provide short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations for addressing operational issues at the park and improving overall park performance.

Short Term Recommendations (Less than 1 year)

1. Site and Facilities

- to the lower parking area
- Lower parking area upgraded for ADA access to the overlook
- New wooden routed signs throughout the park, including trailReplace all picnic tables and grills
- Get the pumps on the wells operational, so that the pond can be filled with water and maintained as designed for fire suppression of the visitor center
- Gravel road to the barn, along with gate entrance at the main road
- Present Land Acquisition Plan to SLAC
- New flagpole for the water/weather conditions in the gorge – Color of the day
- RTP grant project with Friends of Cummins Falls – Overlook of the main Waterfall with ADA access, completed by the end of 2023
- Hardening of the ditch-line on the road and improvement of the road (possibly paving)

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. High angle rescue training
- b. Water rescue training
- c. Maintain high attention to safety of staff, especially going down and up steep rock routes to the base of the waterfall and while dealing with rescues and deep-water situations
- d. Fiscal responsibility training
- e. Continue to seek qualified candidates for seasonal LE Ranger positions
- f. New Conservation Worker 3 position
- g. 2 new Seasonal Interpretive Recreator positions
- h. Continue using AmeriCorps to supplement staffing as needed, especially if e. and f. are not funded yet
- i. Continue and grow our honeybees – continue to sale the honey in our giftshop (This supports or efforts to build on the connection between agriculture and commerce and the historical use of the land surrounding Cummins Falls)

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Maintain high attention to the safety of visitors in the gorge
- b. Maintain in working condition all gauges (depth and rain) up-stream of the waterfall
- c. Ensure all appropriate staff phone numbers are listed to get alert texts from gauges
- d. Maintain the permit system so that the number of people in the gorge and at the base of the waterfall stays within acceptable limits
- e. Update the safety video that people are required to watch before going into the gorge.
- f. Educate public about why the permit system is very beneficial and needed
- g. Acquire at least one mobility vehicle for persons with special needs to use trails

Mid Term Recommendations (2–5 years)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. Build an aviary
- b. Upgrade the stalls in the barn to be better suited for the horses to be kept in them (more safe and more secure for the horses)
- c. Prepare new site for dumpsters (further away from facilities)
- d. Add interpretive signage at key locations
- e. Build at least 2 picnic shelters
- f. Assess whether a 3rd shelter would be appropriate and used for agriculture purposes, such as farmers market
- g. Begin acquiring new lands from Land Acquisition Plan
- h. Develop plan for new lands – access, parking, trails, primary use
- i. As new land is acquired, begin implementation of the plan for new lands

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Continue with high angle and water rescue training, while seeking to maintain up to date best practices
- b. Maintain high attention to the safety of staff, especially going down and up steep rock routes to the base of the waterfall and while dealing with rescues and deep-water situations

- c. Continue to train staff on best practices for fiscal responsibility
- d. Seek to get the requirement for Seasonal LE Ranger position to have a bachelor college degree reduced to an associate degree or be a rising junior
- e. Continue and grow our honeybees – continue to sale the honey in our giftshop (This supports our efforts to build on the connection between agriculture and commerce and the historic use of the land surrounding Cummins Falls)

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Maintain high attention to the safety of visitors in the gorge
- b. Evaluate new technology that does what our current stream gauges do, and possibly more, to determine if up-grades or changes should be made, and maintain in working condition all gauges (depth and rain) up-stream of the waterfall until any changes or up-grades are possibly implemented
- c. Evaluate the permit system to determine if changes should be made, and implement changes if determined changes are needed
- d. Evaluate the safety video to maintain its relevancy and make changes if determined they are needed

Long Term Recommendations (5+ years)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. Finish acquiring lands from Land Acquisition Plan
- b. Add small to medium size amphitheater for programming and small music events
- c. Continue implementation of the plan for the new lands – Access, trails, parking, primary use
- d. Greenhouse to build upon and support agriculture connection to the historical use of the land at and around Cummins Falls – also use to plant and grow native plants to use two establish throughout Cummins Falls State Park property and for sale to the public
- e. Establish vineyard and partnership with local winery – This will be a revenue producing venture as well as another Agriculture project to build on the history of the site
- f. Establish additional picnic sites (Also ADA accessible picnic sites)
- g. Explore possibility of primitive campsites on portions of newly acquired lands

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Continue to evaluate safety and implement strategies as determined appropriate
- b. Evaluate staffing needs and seek improvements as determined appropriate

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Evaluate need and add additional trail mobility vehicles as determined
- b. With the hopeful addition of new property – have more water/river access points
- c. Build ADA specific trail
- d. Create ADA access to the pergola at the Delia Bell Meadow
- e. ADA picnic sites
- f. Create video and audio specific tools for the enjoyment of persons who can only experience the park through these avenues
- g. Create YouTube Channel

Resource Management Plan

A resource management plan is a specific statement of the objectives you have for your land and natural resources, as well as any significant cultural and historic resources stewarded by the state park. This includes a defined series of priorities and activities that will take place in order to meet those objectives. This can include future potential land acquisitions or divestitures that are necessary to meet the park's resource management goals and objectives.

Cummins Falls State Park preserves and protects the unique natural, cultural, and historical resources of Cummins Falls State Park for the benefit and enjoyment of this and future generations. This will be accomplished through research-based conservation management practices, law enforcement, community outreach, volunteer programs, external partnerships, and land acquisitions.

The contents of this resource management plan are as follows:

1. Resource Management Objectives
2. Resource Inventory and Assessment
3. Management Strategies
4. Priority Actions
5. Supplemental Information

Resource Management Objectives

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *More and better stewards:* Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to steward Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *Better resource management practices:* Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

Objective: *Better data and technology:* Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resources stewardship.

Aligned with these objectives are specific strategies to achieve the desired outcomes for the natural, cultural, and historic resources of this park.

Strategies

- A. Cummins Falls State Park is a newly established state park. When the park was established only a small amount of land was secured. It was not a finished or completed project. Much of the land near the waterfall and along the hike into the base of the waterfall is privately owned land. To protect the viewshed and sense of place that is Cummins Falls, and to protect the integrity and quality of the Blackburn Fork Scenic River within Cummins Falls additional lands need to be purchased.
- B. In addition to strategy A. The tremendously growing demand and need for outdoor recreation opportunities was proven by the "out of control" visitation numbers at Cummins Falls State Park to the point of having to reduce visitation through a permit process. Many people are turned away each weekend because of capacity. Additional land with river/water access areas are needed. More areas for fishing, hiking, picnicking, sightseeing, etc. These properties are outlined in the Cummins Falls Land

Acquisition Plan. In addition to the public needs, are the issues of protection and preservation of the Viewshed and sense of place and the quality of Cummins Falls that these lands will provide.

- C. Continued restoration of the Delia Bell Meadow tract. With the planting of more short leaf pine trees. The continued efforts of planting the meadow with native pollinator species of plants
- D. Propagate appropriate native plants for use in habitat restoration projects, decorative landscaping project, for propagation into the community in the surrounding areas, and for sale to the public
- E. Continued efforts in maintaining our honeybee colony
- F. Continued efforts in educating and maintaining native bee colonies
- G. Continuing efforts of preserving the history and culture of Cummins Falls. Documenting and telling the story of Cummins Falls. Preserving pictures of the past
- H. Annually inspecting and marking of park boundaries
- I. Continued exotic invasive plant species removal
- J. Use GIS as a tool for resource management

Resource Inventory and Assessment

The significant natural, cultural and historic resources of the park requiring management are detailed below including a condition assessment rating for each. Condition assessments are selected from the following options based on what most describes the current condition of the resource:

1. **Excellent** – resource is in excellent condition; all potential threats to the integrity of the resource are currently managed and effectively mitigated.
2. **Good** – resource is generally in good condition and stable; threats to the integrity of the resource require regular management in order to mitigate.
3. **Fair** – resource is in stable condition but difficult to mitigate ongoing threats; additional management support is required.
4. **Poor** – resource is generally in poor condition with management support required to both improve existing conditions and address threats.
5. **Critical** – resource is highly threatened or deteriorated and requires immediate management prioritization.

Significant Park Resources	Quantity	Current Conditions	Notes
Cummins Falls	1	Excellent	Manage the number of visitors allowed in the area each day
Blackburn Fork State Scenic River	4 miles	Excellent	Manage the species that people harvest – The number of people will be directly affected by managing the number of people at the waterfall
Hardwood Forest	250 acres	Good	Manage mostly by how we route people
Grasslands / Ag Fields	64 acres	Poor	Manage open areas with planting of native species and prescribed burns – Ag fields, growing crops as determined reasonable by management – honey bees – pasture for horses used in Ranger Horse Mounted Program

Management Strategies

The management strategies outlined below are directly correlated to the resources identified previously in the *Resource Inventory and Assessment* section immediately above. These are general and overall management recommendations for each resource from which priority actions will be determined. Each resource has both a “Public Use” management strategy (which could include limited or no public access, or managed access with infrastructure and regulation) and a “General Management” strategy.

The priority assignments reflect the highest resource management priorities of the park over the next 1-5 years (High Priority) and 6-10 years (Moderate Priority)

Resource	Management Recommendations	Priority
Cummins Falls	<p>Public Use: Hiking, Viewing/Site Seeing, Swimming, Wading, Photography, Sunbathing, Snorkeling, Nature Study. People hike into this area following the river upstream, having to make two or more water crossings before reaching the falls area. That hike in is a big part of the experience. While there, in addition to the things mentioned above, people like to climb on the ledges at the base of the waterfall and get in the falling waters coming off the top of the waterfall.</p> <p>General Management: Permit system to manage the number of people at the base of the waterfall. Standard Operating Procedures for managing safety in the gorge. Regular patrols of the area. Exotic/invasive plant removal, Erosion control by managing where people travel.</p>	
Blackburn Fork State Scenic River	<p>Public Use: Hiking, Wading, Photography, Fishing, Birding, Exploring, Site Seeing</p> <p>General Management: Permit system to manage number of people. Exotic/invasive plant removal. Erosion control by managing where people travel. Regular patrols of area.</p>	
Hardwood Forest	<p>Public Use: Hiking, Birding, Photography, Trail Running.</p> <p>General Management: Manage where people travel - Well designed and maintained trails. Manage threats such as invasive insects (i.e.: hemlock wooly adelgid, emerald ash borer) Prescribed burns.</p>	
Grasslands / Ag Fields	<p>Public Use: Hiking, Birding, Photography, Trail Running.</p> <p>General Management: Prescribed burns. Herbicide to eradicate non-native plant species. Planting native plant seed. Planting native trees species. Bushhogging prescribed areas.</p>	

Land Management Strategies

In some cases, strategic land acquisitions or divestitures are necessary to meet the overall resource management goals and objectives of the park. This can include opportunities to address buffers, watersheds, viewsheds, inholdings, and adjacent properties. The table below details **general strategies** for land management. Timelines refer to Short Term (1-3 years), Mid Term (4-6 years), and Long Term (7-10 years).

Land Management Strategy	Timeline
Multiple land acquisition opportunities for park buffers and to provide additional recreational opportunities	Short – Long Term

Interpretive Programming and Education Plan

The Interpretation, Programming, and Education planning is currently going through a planning process to further build out the process. This section only represents the very basic framework. As TSP moves forward with the future of Interpretive programming and education this section will likely be changed to accommodate those modifications.

Interpretation, Programming and Education Goals

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be the most accessible, welcoming, and inviting system of parks that enriches Tennesseans and visitors through excellent interpretation, education, and resource-based recreation.

Objective: *accessible, welcoming, and inviting to all:* create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited.

Action Plan:

- Seek out relationships with organizations that support marginalized communities and individuals, and offer off-site or on-site interpretive programs
- Actively coach and train staff in the use of inclusive language and in principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Research the histories of marginalized communities relevant to the park's interpretive mission, and include these findings within interpretive displays and programming

Objective: *high quality programming:* develop and support mission-based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community wellbeing.

Action Plan:

- Continuously evaluate program offerings for variety and relevancy to the park mission and themes. Also evaluate participation (time of day, location, etc.)
- Seasonal Interpreters will offer programs that are directly connected to park mission and key interpretive themes
- Develop a volunteer program to assist with program offerings to the public
- Continue planning Junior Ranger Day Camp Programs – Ensure we evaluate each season to ensure relevancy and mission-based content

Objective: *resource-based outdoor recreation:* provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities that ensure representation of Tennessee's natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

- Incorporate Leave No Trace awareness within park programming to encourage appreciation and stewardship
- Offer cycling programs of the area
- Offer early morning hikes, evening and night hikes, Campfire programs that help to instill connection to the park
- Offer night sky programs to help educate about dark skies
- Develop Story Telling event/program
- Develop music and other traditional activity programs

Within these objectives are the following desired outcomes:

- Building stewards
- Ensuring Equity
- Provide the Highest Value
- Develop Resource Based Programming
- Support Staff

Strategic Programs and Services

The strategies detailed below with corresponding action plans are aligned with the Comprehensive Strategic Plan of Tennessee State Parks.

Strategy – Telling Full Stories: to identify and replicate best practices while establishing new methods for representing diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just dialogues.

Action Plan:

- Park interpretive staff, and other staff as assigned, will attend DEI+J training made available by IPE
- Interpretive staff will continue to seek advice from IPE and other professional resources regarding DEI+J while planning programs and exhibits
- Interpretive staff will actively search for and include multiple historical viewpoints, as relevant, within interpretive materials, displays, and programs
- Ranger staff will coach interpreters about inclusive language and how to talk about cultures they do not personally represent

Strategy – Interpretative Media: Connecting people to the resources of Tennessee State Parks with technology in ways that compliment and expand interpretation within and beyond the park, giving everyone access to becoming a park steward.

Action Plan:

- Research available technology to use for content for audio visual experience in our visitor center – plan and implement content
- Develop AR/VR experiences that can be offered on and off site for self-guided experiences
- Develop video content for use online and at the park as interpretive aids and complete programs
- Use existing app such as iNaturalist and PictureThis during programs to aid in the presentation of material and to show visitors about such tools that they can use on their own

Strategy – Develop and maintain a portfolio of programs across multiple types of experiences:

- A. Interpretation of natural, historic, and cultural resources
- B. 3-5 unique experiences for all audiences
- C. Varying intensity from self-guided to immersive experiences
- D. Partnership opportunities for program delivery
- E. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on value of the benefit to the participant.

Action Plan:

- Park Rangers will research / develop and formally assemble a body of keystone interpretive/educational and recreational programs to be offered at routine intervals
- Seasonal interpretive staff will be primarily responsible for delivering keystone programs during the busy season. Additional SIR created programs may be approved where appropriate
- Ranger staff will continue to be available to go off-site to program at schools, civic groups and for other organizations
- Junior Ranger Day Camp programs will continue to be implemented, with the addition of stretched out one day a week Junior Ranger and puddle jumper programs
- A Junior Ranger Booklet will be developed and printed for self-guided use
- All programs offered for a fee will be subject to management approval in terms of quality and cost
- Partnership opportunities shall be explored for individuals seeking to lead/guide programs

Strategy – Develop and maintain diverse and varied resourced-based outdoor recreation opportunities across multiple types of experiences:

- A. Managing recreational use with the stewardship needs of the resource
- B. Varying intensity from self-guided to guided experiences
- C. Partnership opportunities for program delivery
- D. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on value of the benefit to the participant and impact to the resource.

Action Plan:

- Manage existing recreation opportunities (fee and free opportunities)
- Develop new recreation opportunities which meet the need of the public (Much of this could be on newly acquired property.)
- Partnership opportunities shall be explored for individuals interested in leading/Guiding programs
- All programs offered for a fee will be subject to management approval in terms of quality and cost
- New self-guided opportunities shall be explored and developed

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

- Nonpersonal Interpretation: Interpretive media that do not require a person to deliver a message (i.e. exhibits, waysides, brochures, signs, magazines, books, etc.).
- Personal Interpretation: One person or persons providing interpretation to another person or persons.
- Interpretive Program: Activities, presentations, publications, audio-visual media, signs, and exhibits that convey key heritage resource messages to audiences. (Adapted from US Fish & Wildlife Service)
- Interpretation: a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us.

Financial Performance Goals

Financial performance goals are a critical performance management tool of the Tennessee State Park System. While the financial performance of parks are managed more intently at the system level, individual parks are expected to recover a portion of their operating costs through the generation of earned revenues where appropriate and to contribute to the system goals. The majority of earned revenues at state parks are generated through facility usage (campsites, cabins, lodge rooms, rentable pavilions, etc.), the delivery of fee-based programs and services, equipment rental and usage, and retail sales. Other forms of revenue generation come from golf courses and restaurants where those amenities are present. That said, not all parks have the same ability to generate earned revenues because the availability of facilities or programs vary widely from one park to the next. The “recovery” of operational costs by earned revenues is referred to as “cost recovery”. Operating costs beyond those supported by earned revenues represents the extent to which state funding support operations at each park.

The table below represents the overall park cost recovery for this specific park for the most recent fiscal year and forecast estimates for the upcoming five years. These estimates are based on projection estimates for known and foreseeable costs and recovery figures.

FINANICAL PERFORMANCE GOALS						
	Current Cost Recovery (2022)	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2023	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2024	Target Cost Recovery: FY: 2025	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2026	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2027
Park Overall	62.08%	51.29%	55.30%	55.55%	55.80%	56.05%

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